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ABSTRACT

This brief provides an overview of the foundation and framework for the Research Institute on Secondary Education Reform (RISER) for Youth with Disabilities. RISER focuses on secondary schools engaged in reform efforts that include students with disabilities and seeks to identify restructuring practices that benefit all students. RISER's goal is to expand the knowledge base related to practices in secondary schools that enhance authentic learning, achievement, and outcomes for students with disabilities. After discussing pitfalls and possibilities in education reform and inclusion, the brief describes three essential features of authentic student learning: (1) construction of knowledge, in which students take information and construct knowledge using higher order thinking processes to transform information into knowledge; (2) disciplined inquiry, in which students draw on the established knowledge base to conceptualize problems in terms of the discipline and elaborate their inquiry via extensive writing; and (3) value beyond school, in which students generate products of learning that have an audience beyond the classroom. The relationship between authentic achievement and special education is explored and an expanded model of authentic achievement is introduced, the Schools of Authentic and Inclusive Learning, which addresses the needs and assets of students with disabilities. (Contains 15 references.) (CR)

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Research Institute on Secondary Education Reform (RISER)
for Youth with Disabilities

Brief

No. 1

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Schools of Authentic and Inclusive Learning

Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell, L. Allen Phelps, Jeff Braden, & Valli Warren

The era of reform has arrived at the doorstep and captured the full attention of schools across America. In many communities, fundamental assumptions about teaching and learning, particularly in high schools, are being carefully scrutinized and, in some cases, transformed dramatically. For the past fifteen years (i.e., since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*), the political, economic, and social efficacy of high schools has been challenged by business leaders, parents, and politicians. Specific reform movements (e.g., standards-based reform, school restructuring, vouchers, school-to-work, charter and choice schools) emerged rapidly in response to these concerns and the poor performance of America's youth on international comparisons of student achievement. This trend is requiring secondary-level educators to re-examine their teaching in terms of what *new approaches* (e.g., curriculum and instructional strategies, organizational models, and support services) are available, and what *results* (e.g., academic achievement gains, post-school outcomes) have they achieved.

Unfortunately, most of the recent emphases on educational reform (and the related programs and strategies) have been generated with limited research or consideration of the implications these reforms hold for students with disabilities. We have reached a critical point in the educational reform dialogue where special

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INSTITUTE MISSION

The mission of the institute is to expand the current knowledge base related to practices and policies in secondary schools that enhance learning, achievement and postschool outcomes for students with disabilities.

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CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are critical features of instruction, assessment, and support strategies that promote authentic understanding, and achievement (and performance) for all students?

2. How have changes in authentic inclusive learning and schooling practices affected the school and postschool outcomes (and their interaction) for students with disabilities (collectively and disaggregated) using frames of reference focused on equity, value added, and accountability?

3. How do schools accommodate district and state outcome assessments, and how do such accommodations affect the participation in, reporting of, and validity of assessment?

4. In schools evolving toward authentic and inclusive instruction, what are the roles and expectations of stakeholders as they engage in planning for secondary and postsecondary experiences?

5. What contextual factors are required to support and sustain the development of secondary-level learning environments that promote authentic understanding, achievement, and performances for all students?

6. What strategies are effective in providing both information and support to policymakers, school administrators, teachers, human service personnel, and the community so they utilize the findings to create and support learning environments that promote authentic understanding, achievement and performance for all students?

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education programs and the links to related disciplines (e.g., developmental disabilities, rehabilitation, mental health) must be redesigned, along with programs in general education, and in a way that is maximally integrated with general education. Special education and other programs addressing the needs of young people with disabilities cannot evolve in isolation from the broader national policy interests and reforms. As the world beyond school changes, all students (and especially those with disabilities) must have access to challenging curricula and instructional experiences that will prepare them to successfully meet the new academic learning standards that characterize what graduates must know and be able to perform.

Reconciling the conflicts between standards-based educational reform and individualized education, in which equity and diversity concerns are of paramount importance, will not be easy, but it does seem possible. The Committee on Goals 2000 and the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997) argues that the convergence of these positions can be achieved if two principles are implemented:

> Our two guiding principles are that all students should have access to challenging standards and that policy makers and educators should be held publicly accountable for every student's performance. However, we also conclude that adaptations will be required for some students with disabilities, particularly those with significant cognitive disabilities. Moreover, efforts to incorporate students with varying disabilities effectively will be hindered over the short term by a shortage of financial and professional resources, an "inadequate research base" (emphasis added), and conceptual ambiguities in both policy frameworks. (p. 2)

For youth with disabilities, as well as other youth, the experiences of high school can have long-term effects on opportunities to attend college, enter the workplace, or live independently. One recent analysis of postschool outcome studies (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997) reveals results for youth with disabilities that are uniformly disappointing. The dropout rates for these youth exceed those of nondisabled students by nearly a factor of two. While nearly 85% of high school students graduate in four years, only 55% of learning and emotionally disabled students receive a high school diploma. For students with disabilities who do complete high school, access to employment, earnings, and postsecondary education falls substantially below that of their peers. Hence, the U.S. Department of Education continues to challenge educators and citizens to build learning systems that ensure ***all*** students will achieve challenging academic standards. The recently enacted IDEA Amendments emphasize principles and themes that are consistent with the efforts to advance educational reform generally (see text box).

Strategies for Success (source: IDEA '97 Overview)

- Raising expectations for children with disabilities
- Increasing parental involvement in the education of their children
- Ensuring that regular education teachers are involved in planning and assessing children's progress
- Including children with disabilities in assessments, performance goals, and reports to the public
- Supporting quality professional development for all personnel who are involved in educating children with disabilities

http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/IDEA/overview.html

This *Brief* provides an overview of the foundation and framework for the Research Institute on Secondary Education Reform

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(RISER) for Youth with Disabilities. RISER focuses on secondary schools engaged in reform efforts that include students with disabilities and seeks to identify educational restructuring practices that benefit *all* students. RISER's goal is to expand the current knowledge base related to practices and policies in secondary schools that enhance authentic learning, achievement, and related postschool outcomes for students with disabilities. Hence, the focus of the institute is to examine how inclusive efforts interact with reform efforts in general education, and in particular those efforts based on authentic achievement (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Newmann, Wehlage, & Secada, 1995). Therefore, the foundation from which the research agenda is built requires an understanding of inclusion issues as well as authentic achievement prior to discussing the RISER model.

Education Reform and Inclusion: Pitfalls and Possibilities

Some special educators attempt to improve the connections between general and special education by advocating the education of all students within the general education mainstream. To these educators, inclusive education is the best way to provide education for students with disabilities. Lipsky and Gartner (1996) identify seven necessary factors in successful inclusion: " visionary leadership..., collaboration..., refocused use of assessment..., supports for staff and students..., funding..., effective parent involvement..., and curricular adaptation and adopting effective instructional practices..." (pp. 11-12). Inclusion efforts appear to be growing. They currently occur in every state, many locations, at all grade levels and with all types of disabilities (National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, as cited in Lipsky & Gartner, 1996).

Other special educators argue against inclusion for students with disabilities. "We understand relatively little about how student placement determines what is possible and what is probable as far as instruction and its outcomes are concerned" (Kauffman, 1993, p. 8). To add to this uncertainty, inclusion critics charge that the general education environment and instructional practices are not suitable (at this time) for students with disabilities. For example, negative teacher attitudes toward students with disabilities, lack of teacher and administrator knowledge/competence related to instruction of students with disabilities, and the need for ongoing teacher support may undermine successful education for students with disabilities. At the instructional level, critics cite studies (see below) that document problems with general education classroom practices as they relate to students with disabilities. These studies find that general educators primarily rely on large group instruction with little attention to individual needs and progress. General educators are found to be mostly concerned with maintaining classroom routines and conformity (Baker & Zigmond, 1990, 1995; McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee, 1993; Zigmond & Baker, 1994). Additionally, general education teachers do not feel prepared to develop accommodations and do not have enough collaboration time with special educators to develop instructional accommodations (Schumm & Vaughn, 1995). As a result, accommodations are rarely used unless they are easy to implement and have limited impact on classroom routine or time (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Phillips, & Karns, 1995; Munson, 1987).

These critics argue for a continuum of services to meet the needs of all students with disabilities. Furthermore, their concerns about general education as the primary setting for instruction deepen when they consider secondary education. "The curriculum shifts into high gear in the form of bodies of knowledge, usually referred to as content-area courses. Students are expected to digest the material and through their skills demonstrate the ability to use the information for ever increasingly abstract purposes. These purposes are only occasionally practical in the sense of everyday use" (Lieberman, 1996, p. 22). But in this way many students with disabilities are not provided with the skills and knowledge essential for their adult lives. When inappropriate content is coupled with greater difficulty in skill and knowledge acquisition, application, and retention, the end

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result can be disastrous. These students experience a reduced "end-point" (acquiring less skill and knowledge than do their peers without disabilities), few skills that are needed for their everyday survival, and a great deal of difficulty applying what they have learned to everyday tasks and settings. Interestingly, the identical argument undergirds the criticism of high schools in general. All students are said not to be getting knowledge and skills they can use in today's real-world settings (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991).

Although these issues may be argued in moral, ethical, and philosophical terms, at the individual classroom or system level, the debate may also be addressed in empirical terms. That is, rather than arguing if it is possible or right, we are interested in addressing the question, "Can youth with disabilities be fully and effectively included in redesigned/restructured high schools?" The answer to this question depends in part on how one defines a successfully restructured high school setting. We have selected the constructs of "authentic student achievement" and "authentic pedagogy" as they emerged from a 5-year study of restructured schools (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Newmann et al., 1995) to help us define successful restructuring.

The constructs of authentic learning and teaching were chosen for several reasons. First, they address the instructional level concerns raised by special educators opposed to more inclusive educational models. Clearly, these concerns argue for overhauling the entire system of education in pursuit of new and more appropriate student outcomes. Second, authentic instruction is associated with improved outcomes for a variety of students, including students considered to be at risk. Third, many of the critical elements of authentic achievement parallel elements identified as critical in inclusive education in general and some specific special education practices. Finally, authentic achievement does not dictate specific instructional methods. Instead, it frames the purpose of every administrative and instructional activity within the context of authentic student learning. Therefore, we ask, "Could 'authentic achievement' be used to restructure school and classroom settings that allow all students to learn together and be successful beyond school?"

Authentic Learning, Teaching and Schooling

Educators, policymakers, and researchers must grapple with the question, "What makes school reform successful?" After examining data from more than 1,500 schools across the U.S., Newmann, Wehlage, and colleagues came to the conclusion that school reform was successful when it created authentic student learning. That is, instructional methods, administrative structures, and community/school supports did not, in and of themselves, lead to better student outcomes in restructured schools; rather, it was a primary focus on student achievement that distinguished successful from unsuccessful school reform efforts. Successful schools kept student performance as their focus as they modified instructional practices, administrative structures, and community/school supports to achieve student learning (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

Student learning is the core of successful school reform. Authentic student learning, uncovered in longitudinal studies of classrooms in restructured schools, has three essential features:

1. *Construction of knowledge*, in which students take information and construct (not merely reproduce) knowledge using higher order thinking processes (e.g., organize, synthesize, interpret, explain, evaluate) to transform information into knowledge.
2. *Disciplined inquiry*, in which students draw on the established knowledge base (e.g., mathematics, social studies) to conceptualize problems in terms of the discipline (e.g., using the scientific process to understand biology), and elaborate their inquiry via extensive writing.
3. *Value beyond school*, in which students generate products of learning that have an audience or value beyond the classroom (e.g., published poetry, collection of data for genuine research projects). Such products

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contrast with products that exist primarily or solely for purposes of educational evaluation (e.g., tests, quizzes, papers that only teachers read).

Schools that structure their pedagogy, school organizational capacities, and external supports to achieve authentic student performances are likely to succeed in promoting high-quality student outcomes, as measured by in-class tasks and standardized measures of academic achievement. Furthermore, these outcomes are likely to be equitable (i.e., they tend to reduce differences in achievement among diverse minority and class groups; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995).

Implementation of authentic achievement and schooling depends heavily on the commitment and competence of teaching staff to realize its aims. The intent of authentic achievement and schooling as a framework is to focus educators' attention on the knowledge and skills they want students to master. When focusing on the knowledge and skills they want students to master, educators need to examine the tests/assessments and instruction they use. These pedagogical tools reflect the extent of cognitive challenges posed to students. The presence of cognitive challenges embedded in instruction influences the quality of student learning and is reflected in authentic student achievement. In order for authentic student achievement to occur, educators need to engage in authentic pedagogy, where instructional and assessment strategies require students to think, develop in-depth understanding, and apply their knowledge to the real world. Authentic achievement, therefore, is a definition of authentic pedagogy and is supported by the organizational capacity of the school and external supports. Elements of authentic achievement appear to be found in some special education practices. These practices are discussed below and are followed with a discussion of other considerations as they relate to students with disabilities.

Authentic Achievement and Special Education

For many years, special educators have considered concepts that parallel the essential features of authentic achievement. However, they have used different terminology to refer to these skills and related practices. Special education literature devoted to learning to learn, using metacognitive strategies (e.g., problem solving), building on foundational information, learning to generalize, and curriculum based assessment all reflect skills and practices that are consistent with those emphasized in the construction of knowledge component. Each of these techniques focuses on developing and utilizing higher order thinking. Additionally, they require students to move beyond reproducing knowledge to manipulating and applying it, often in a way that is meaningful in their lives.

Special education literature currently reveals little attention to the use of disciplinary practices. However, it contains other practices, which appear to parallel the remaining elements of disciplined inquiry. When an expansive definition of disciplinary content is utilized, it is clear that special educators have always demanded that all students with disabilities demonstrate some level of foundational knowledge associated with the various academic disciplines. This includes functional skills and activities of daily living skills. Special educators have attempted to ensure that students have "deep knowledge" in the "disciplines" by utilizing discrimination learning techniques, multiple approaches to demonstrate skill proficiency or knowledge of content, and placing emphasis on developing understanding beyond rote memorization to application and generalization. Furthermore, special education practices have often required elaborated communication of knowledge and skills by requiring performance in many community and school settings, over various time periods and within the context of various tasks. In recent years, special educators have also explored the use of collaborative and cooperative learning strategies as ways to deepen student understanding and skill/ knowledge acquisition.

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However, special education has also been accused of operating from a deficit model in which there are significantly lowered expectations for student skills and knowledge's (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998).

The value beyond school element appears to be the most readily translatable to special education practices. For years, special educators have focused on real life issues/ problems, emphasized the critical need for experiential and community based learning, personalized learning through the use of the IEP and targeting task relevance for individual students, and attended to assisting students in generalization across tasks and settings. In addition, the performances of special education students are often evaluated by individuals who are not educators, including employers and parents. Although special education has historically emphasized student performance in nonschool contexts (e.g., school-to-work transition, life/ community skills), the authentic achievement definition of value beyond school is different. Value beyond school in the authentic achievement paradigm means that the products of student learning have an *immediate* personal or public value within the context of that task. The products may also have an *eventual* value beyond school if the students choose to explore those connections. For example, learning to balance your checkbook for the purpose of being able to run a household in the future would not meet the value beyond school criteria, in and of itself. However, if the student currently has a checkbook that needs to be balanced and that student makes the connection to the future need to balance her checkbook, then the task is said to be authentic.

Considerations

When applying authentic achievement to students with disabilities, the questions of adaptation and accommodation arise. Within authentic achievement, the curricular level or complexity can be adjusted to meet diverse student abilities. Thus, the model generalizes across grades, and across individuals at different ability levels within a classroom. Furthermore, Newmann and Wehlage (1995) acknowledge that not all instructional experiences can capture all three elements. In fact, "repetitive practice, retrieving information, and memorization of facts or rules may be necessary to build knowledge and skills as a foundation for authentic performance" (Newmann & Wehlage, p. 11). Newmann and Wehlage recommend that educators not abandon all forms of less authentic work. Instead, educators should focus on the goal of authentic achievement as they plan, deliver, and evaluate educational experiences for their students. Finally, Newmann and Wehlage emphasize that specific educational practices do NOT equal authentic learning. Although some instructional practices appear more authentic (e.g., hands-on projects, small group work), it is the intellectual demands of student performance that determines authenticity.

RISER Model

Although authentic achievement provides the basis of the investigative framework for this project, we have modified the original model to specifically address the needs and assets of students with disabilities. This expanded model is known as Schools of Authentic and Inclusive Learning (SAIL). To accomplish the goal of the Institute, we have conceptualized the SAIL model as three primary parts: outcomes, teaching and learning, and policy and context (see Figure 1).

Outcomes

As highlighted by Newmann and Wehlage, a clear, shared vision of student learning that produces authentic achievement creates a learning environment where all students are challenged academically. The RISER vision of reform and inclusion efforts center on the outcomes that reflect high intellectual quality. Therefore, we begin with the standards for authentic achievement defined by Newmann and Wehlage (1995) and Newmann et al. (1995). We add to these outcome standards graduation rates and attendance rates, performance on standardized tests, performance on standards and benchmarks (reflecting the core attributes of authentic achievement), and other assessments used to determine the effectiveness of school

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practices (e.g., district, state proficiency tests). Additional considerations will be focused on students' work/performance level. We also regard as important post-school outcomes that reflect adult life: employment, continuing post-secondary education, independent living and community functioning, and social-emotional functioning.

The following research questions are being addressed in the RISER model: (a) How have changes in authentic inclusive learning and schooling practices affected the within-school and post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (collectively and disaggregated) using frames of reference focused on equity, value added and accountability? and (b) How do schools accommodate students with disabilities in district and state outcome assessments, and how do such accommodations affect the participation in, reporting of, and validity of assessment?

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning within the SAIL model emphasizes pedagogical practices reflecting high intellectual quality. We will focus on identifying and describing learning experiences in which all students produce knowledge through higher order thinking operations. We extend the authentic achievement characteristic "value beyond school" to include learning in nonschool contexts. Finally, we alter the authentic achievement standard requiring elaborated written communication to include a variety of communication modalities used in various disciplines and professions, with necessary adaptations and accommodations.

The research question related to this aspect of the model is: What are critical features of instruction, assessment, and support strategies that promote authentic understanding, achievement, and performance for all students?

Policy and Context

Finally, the professional community and external supports are also being examined. Research in this area explores the engagement of teachers, administrators, support service staff, parents, and others in creating frequent and on-going communication regarding student learning and achievement. Additionally, we will examine how parents and community leaders are involved in planning and setting standards for students' learning outcomes and experiences, and how teachers enhance their professional development.

The research questions for policy and context are: (a) In schools evolving toward authentic and inclusive instruction, what are the roles and expectations of stakeholders as they engage in planning for secondary and post-secondary experiences? and (b) What contextual factors are required to support and sustain the development of secondary-level learning environments that promote authentic understanding, achievement, and performances for all students?

Conclusion

Currently, special educators are in disagreement as to what constitutes appropriate optional educational opportunities for students with disabilities. This discussion centers on the issue of inclusion. Proponents of inclusion argue that the general education setting provides the widest array of opportunities for all students. Inclusion critics state that the impact of setting has not yet been documented and that general education needs to be significantly reformed before inclusive efforts can be seriously considered. Historically and unfortunately, general education reform efforts have often provided little consideration to the needs and goals of students with disabilities. Despite these circumstances, some of these efforts have shown promise for improving outcomes for students without disabilities. Authentic pedagogy and achievement has shown particular promise for outcome improvement with many types of students, including students considered at-risk for school failure. Given the similarities between reform based on authentic achievement and reform based on inclusive education, RISER has decided to investigate how teaching and learning focused on authentic achievement affects students with disabilities. In 1999 and beyond, RISER is working with schools who have

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incorporated both elements, reform of instruction and inclusion efforts, into their current schooling operations. We will identify and document practices that are effective for all students, attempt to replicate these practices in other sites, and disseminate the results. Our goal is to identify and disseminate practices that ensure all students, including those with disabilities, meet high levels of authentic student performance.

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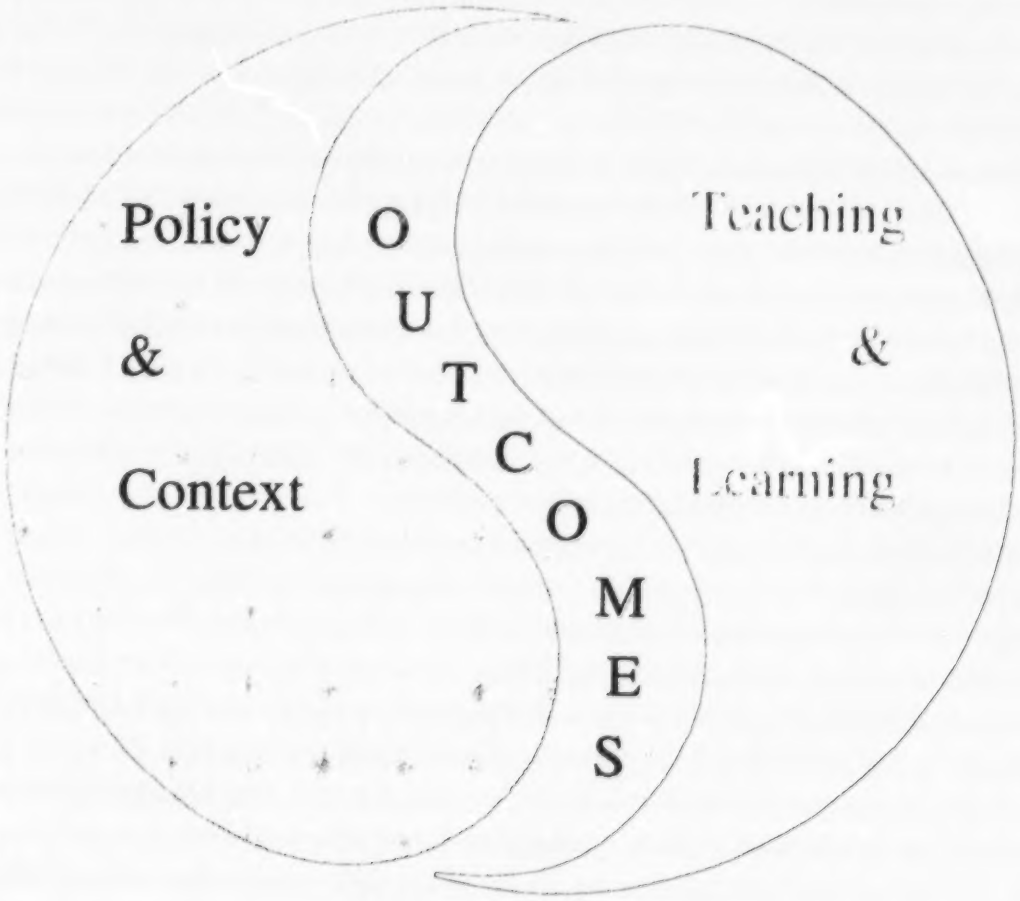
Figure 1. Schools of Authentic and Inclusive Learning Model



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